



Alcimedes

A Canadian meta-analysis study published in the BMJ has further fuelled the "Cannabis debate" by claiming that cannabis users are approximately twice as likely to cause a vehicle crash as non-users.¹ The authors combined comparable data from nine studies and demonstrated that there was an increased risk of both fatal and non-fatal collisions in cannabis users who had smoked within 3 h of the collision. Such data is likely to be of interest to the UK Government that is considering new legislation on drink and drug driving, in light of Sir Peter North's report from 2010.

The controversial subject of assisted suicide is again making the headlines with the GMC offering a three month consultation period on providing advice for doctors.^{2,3} Principally, their concern is how best to advise doctors who have received a complaint regarding his or her involvement in a patient's death, where the family perceive the doctor to have assisted in the patient's suicide.

However, the GMC has also emphasised that the number of such complaints against doctors is relatively low, with only three recorded cases against UK doctors being investigated by the GMC in the past ten years.

Meanwhile, across the Channel in the notoriously-liberal Netherlands, a pro-euthanasia organisation is now offering a state-of-the-art service for those who want a no-frills termination.⁴ The mobile units ("Levenseinde" – right to die) will be dispatched from the Hague and provide a doctor, fully armed with a lethal cocktail of drugs, ready to take aim as soon as the call has been received. This service, which is being funded by the Dutch right-to-die group NVVE is being offered free of charge to the patients, but has been condemned by pro-life groups as being offensive and politically motivated. At the time of writing, the organisation providing the service had not had any takers.

Netherlands set the pace in 2002 by becoming the first country in the world to legalise euthanasia. Alcimedes strongly advises anyone in Holland to ring the correct number when next ordering a pizza.

The Government's Justice Committee has published a report into the highly emotive subject of Presumption of Death.⁵ Aside from the distress of losing a loved one, whenever someone goes

missing without trace, there can be serious financial consequences for the family left behind, including repossession of property and bankruptcy from non-payment of loans or direct debits that have not been cancelled. The Committee's study has concluded that the current system in England and Wales is unacceptable and they have suggested a three-line approach to addressing this problem.

Firstly, a Presumption of Death Act should be introduced along the same founding principles of the system that has been in place and working effectively in Scotland for the past 34 years. Secondly, a system of Guardianship should be adopted that would allow the family to take control of the missing person's finances after three months of their disappearance: this would be similar to the procedure that is in place in Australia. Finally, there should be effective guidance and support to those families who are affected by the disappearance.

The Ministry of Justice is expected to respond to the report in coming months.

Scotland Yard has announced that it is launching a massive cold-case review of unsolved murders from 1980 to 2010.⁶ Under Operation Yetna, the forensic departments will consider over 200 cases, some of which date back to 1967, almost two decades before the introduction of DNA analysis in forensic cases. A new computer system HOLMES2 has also been introduced to help with data analysis. It has been suggested that the recent re-trial in the murder of Stephen Lawrence, which introduced new DNA evidence into the proceedings, may have helped provide impetus to this review.

References

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